

# FAMILY REFUSAL AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THE HOMELESSNESS PROBLEM AMONG FORMER PRISONERS IN MALAYSIA

Mohd Alif Jasni<sup>1</sup>  
Siti Hajar Abu Bakar Ah<sup>1</sup>  
Jal Zabdi Mohd Yusoff<sup>2</sup>  
Khairiyah Md Shahid<sup>3</sup>  
Noralina Omar<sup>1</sup>  
Zaiton Azman<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Failure to live in conducive homes is indeed the greatest challenge faced by former prisoners in dealing with their re-integration process. One of the major concerns include the acceptance back into their homes, as secure housing is considered their most crucial short-term need upon which indirectly, will influence other aspects of their lives. Besides, strong familial support will enable the former prisoners to regain themselves in order to avoid re-incarceration. Unfortunately, reality is showing the opposite, whereby former prisoners lose contact with their families and subsequently, end up being homeless. Therefore, this article identifies the critical role played by the family institution in providing shelter for former prisoners during their reintegration period back into the society. This study includes in-depth interview sessions with 16 homeless respondents who were former prisoners, without taking into account the type of offences they committed. Furthermore, findings revealed three main contributing factors that related to homelessness among released offenders. They were the refusal of family to accept them back, the inability to stay in one place and the absence of parents to live with. The scenario further describes the strong connection between former prisoners and their incapability to acquire shelter. Thus, measures need to be taken to encourage former prisoners and their families to unite in efforts to curb the homelessness issue faced by them.

**Keywords:** Homelessness, Former prisoner, Shelter, Re-integration, Family

## Introduction

Finding shelter to live in can be a frustrating and infuriating process for former prisoners each time they are released from prison. Hence, a stable home plays a vital role in assisting former prisoners to succeed in their transition from prison back into their society. Moreover, earlier researches believed that a safe home works as a short-term requisite for former prisoners when they are released (Lutze, Rosky & Hamilton 2013), as they are at risk of developing mental problems (Burgard, Seefeldt, & Zelner 2012), drug abuse (Visher & Travis 2011), and weak family relationship. However, a dysfunctional family relationship or lacking of familial support increases the risk of former prisoners becoming homeless as families' refusal to acknowledge and accept them will certainly affect their re-integration process and failure to own a home or shelter (Burgard, Seefeldt & Zelner 2012). Hence, former prisoners' experience structural challenge to obtain shelter which results in them becoming homeless (Geller & Curtis 2001).

In acquiring shelter, most former offenders are left with the choice of either to live with family or friends, for a temporary period of time (Anderson-Facile 2009). This is because they might have several issues in re-uniting with their family and friends, since their relationship deteriorated due to their imprisonment (Anderson-Facile, 2009). Therefore, the incapability of family and friends in providing shelter for these former offenders had placed them at a higher risk of being homeless (Thompson 2003). In addition, former prisoners also encounter difficulties in obtaining jobs, whereby their unemployment is a factor that contributes to their homelessness (Burgard, Seefeldt & Zelner 2012); hence, the mentioned risk veritably affects the success of their re-integration process.

Thus, this article aims to examine family refusals to accept former prisoners as the main factor in their failure to obtain shelter, which resulted into homelessness being an issue amongst them. This situation also points to the importance of efforts in uniting former prisoners with their families to combat the homelessness issues. Moreover, this research further analysed the experience of re-integration amongst former prisoners, with the focus on shelter and related social issues. In addition, the findings provides information by narrowing the gap in past researches relating to former prisoners' homelessness issue, particularly in Malaysia.

## Literature Review

### *The importance of shelter throughout the re-integration process*

Globally, the importance of acquiring shelter has been discussed extensively in numerous studies in ensuring successful transition of former prisoners back into the society. Shelter is essentially crucial for the re-integration process as it functions as a safe place for former prisoners to manage their social, medical, and psychological as well as economic needs. A stable home provides a proper foundation for the re-integration process in allowing them to focus on their jobs, medical treatments, and others (Fontaine & Biess 2012). Besides, acquiring shelter also enables them to carry out their daily routine in a safe environment as well as to build a positive social network, and lastly, to integrate with society in a sustainable manner.

However, maintaining a stable home is the first and foremost challenge endured by the former prisoners (LaVigne & Kachnowski 2005), upon release. They not only encounter difficulties in various issues upon re-integrating into society (Gowan 2002); but former prisoners may also experience unemployment that contributes to housing insecurity or homelessness (Herbert et al. 2015). In addition, they are also exposed to discrimination by property owners who restrict them from obtaining housing units and affecting their families with whom they plan to live with (Geller & Curtis 2001).

### *Homelessness among Former Prisoners in Malaysia*

From the Malaysian perspective, there is still no formal definition of homelessness (Wee & Raja Norliana 2015), partly due to its complex nature. The common misconception on homelessness tends to be associated with people sleeping on the streets. However, a person can also be deemed homeless if one stays at temporary housing, such as boarding homes or transition units (Murphy 2016). Several contributing factors related to homelessness are unemployment, scarcity of low-cost housing, weak family relationship, and departure from rehabilitation institutions (i.e. mental rehabilitation centre or prison) (Murphy 2016). The issue with homelessness may not automatically led to re-occurrence of crime, but indirectly, homeless former prisoners are prone to negative and harmful influences surrounding them, such as drug dealing, negative acquaintances, and discrimination within the neighbourhood. Studies have shown that imprisonment can lead to negative effects of former prisoners' ability to obtain stable homes (Geller & Curtis 2001).

As a preamble to this discussion, the homelessness issue amongst the former prisoners in Malaysia has been inadequately studied and thus, reflected in the limited literature available on this matter. Numerous attempts were made in finding the meaning of homeless, hence, this research revealed that most previous researches related to homelessness issue within the country are generally defined as 'homeless' in a vague and ambiguous manner. In other words, previous researches solely discussed this mentioned group (homeless people) in a general manner. However, according to Ku Basyirah, Mohd Suhaimi & Norulhuda (2017), homeless individuals can be divided into three categories, namely, drug addicts, people suffering from mental illness, and destitute people (having no home and residency) despite being employed.

On the other hand, this study along with its focus and emphasis further discusses the issue of homelessness amongst former prisoners due to family’s refusal to accept them back into their fold. Accordingly, questions and concerns of homelessness are fused into the category of displaced and isolated groups, which fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD) with its enforcement mandated to the Social Welfare Department (SWD) (Wee & Raja Norliana 2015). As observed, only 10 percent of the homeless are non-Malaysians whilst regrettably, the majority of the homeless were locals. Most homeless individuals were from big cities in Malaysia, for instance Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Kuching, as well as George Town (Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah 2017). Based on table 1, in 2013, the number of homeless individuals were recorded at 1048, which consisted of 730 males and 318 females. Moreover, the number of homeless individuals further increased in 2014 with the recorded number at 1469, comprising of 988 males and 481 females. Meanwhile, the figure in 2015 further escalated to 1527, which encompasses 1003 males and 524 females (Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah 2017).

Apart from the above, the highest numbers of homeless people were in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Pulau Pinang, as metioned in table 1.

**Table 1: Total number of homeless people in Malaysia (2013-2015)**

Year	Number of homeless people
2013	1048
2014	1469
2015	1527

Source: Portal Rasmi Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia (2016) cited in Muhammad Wafi & Sharifah Rohayah (2017)

Subsequently, in terms of socio-demographics, the homeless individuals in Malaysia are predominantly male; however, a rising number of homeless females can also be observed (Hussin 2016). Besides, the homeless population also came from different ethnic groups, namely the Malays, Indians, Chinese, and others, which reflects the socio-cultural diversity of the homeless (Nor Amalina, Zaliha & Yarina 2016). Likewise, there were not only Malaysian homeless people, but also they were also immigrants settling in Malaysia from the neighbouring countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar (Nor Amalina et al. 2016). Most of the homeless face challenges and obstacles, namely physical abuse, mental problem, drug abuse, alcohol addiction, and poverty (Ku Basyirah et al. 2017). Hence, to a certain extent, when they faced social pressure, for instance losing employment, having health problems and disabilities it would consequently contribute more towards the homelessness’s problem. Moreover, inadequacy of resources would also be a reason for them to become homeless for a long time (Commonwealth of Australia 2008).

Based on previous studies, majority of them were seen at Chow Kit road, Dang Wangi, Dataran Merdeka, Masjid Jamek, and Central Market. They usually would sleep in boxes or any mattresses they found in shelter areas, at the end of shops, or even at the sidewalks (Syafiq & Doris 2018). Nevertheless, during the daylight, they would walk around to find food by doing various odd jobs. Previous research also exposed that there were different issues faced by male and female homeless individuals. Most of the homeless male will sleep at the edge of shops compared to females who are usually found at Lorong Haji Taib, Lorong Chow Kit, and Lorong Tion Nam to ensure the safety of their small children and pregnant women (Alhabshi & Abdul Manan 2012). From the study conducted by Nurul Mahfuzah, Nur Zakirah, Nur Fatini, Ammar Faidhi, Siti Munira, Mohd Shahril, Nor Aini (2016), it was found that the factors leading to homelessness are family disorganization, employment loss and being underemployed, having no residency as well as attitude problems.

Meanwhile, there were also homeless people who are employed but facing poverty (Mohd Suhaimi, Khaidzir, Nasrudin & NikHairi 2016). The scenario worsens as they are paid poorly, as low as RM20 per day or RM600 per month, which is categorized as under-poverty level income in a city like Kuala Lumpur (Mohd Suhaimi et. al 2016). Apart from employment, there are other factors contributing to homelessness, such as individuals who are incapable of owning or renting a house especially within the city areas. In addition, old people without children to care for them,

drug addicts, mental health patients and those who ran away from their homes due to relationship problems, family issues or other social factors involving children (Mohd Suhaimi et al. 2016), are also experiencing homelessness.

Efforts and attempts to help the homeless have been initiated by agencies that includes the Social Welfare Department (SWD), Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), and Lembaga Zakat Selangor (LZS). Other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also assisted them with the aim and intention to circumvent them from engaging in social problems, crimes, and drug abuse. In lieu of this, the construction of *Anjung Singgah* in Jalan Hang Lekiu, Kuala Lumpur has supported homeless individuals' needs for food, shelter, and other necessities to manage themselves. In Malaysia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been actively involved in assisting the homeless. Besides government agencies, NGOs also act as a channel in voicing out the needs, wants, and opinions of the homeless', to the public and the government. Other NGOs that are actively assisting the government in this matter are Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam (PERTIWI) Soup Kitchen, Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK), Dapur Jalanan, Need to Feed the Needy (NFN), JOM Bekpes!, Kaseh4U, Fungates Superflow Foundation, and Food Not Bombs (Nor Amalina, Zaliha & Yarina 2018).

Notably, these NGOs have certainly given assistance in an ad-hoc manner and not in a comprehensive way (Rafiza, Jaffary, Ahmad Sunawari & Zaizul 2017). The problems faced by the NGOs are mainly due to fund insufficiency and the lack of resources for professional social workers in executing the programs. Therefore, this is the answer as to why they are unable to help the homeless in a more comprehensive manner (Wong, Lee, Mohd Saiful, Muhamat Hamzah, Muhd Farid 2014). Currently, the programs or initiatives to provide assistance for the homeless, especially in Kuala Lumpur, are predominantly conducted by NGOs for a short period and in one off-centers. Therefore, it does not really affect the homeless individuals' life and they are still incapable of improving themselves and are still dependent on the society for their existence (Rafiza, Jaffary, Ahmad Sunawari & Zaizul 2017).

It can be seen that previous studies on the homeless in Malaysia were mainly on the homelessness issue in general terms, without giving much attention to the different groups of the homeless, as in actuality, there are various categories of homeless throughout the country. Accordingly, each of the group have differences in background and social demographics that have caused their homelessness as well as their very own social problems. Aside from the above-mentioned circumstances of homelessness, the article further highlights the homelessness issue amongst former prisoners since they are the most isolated and muted group compared to other homeless groups in Malaysia. Additionally, the article focused on the reason of family's refusal of accepting former prisoners back into their homes as a cause for their homelessness. As such, the role of the family is very important in ensuring the success of former prisoners' re-integration after their release from prison. Consequently, there is a vital need to discuss this issue academically as it gives a better understanding of homelessness in Malaysia.

### ***Family as Shelter Provider for Former Prisoners***

For most former prisoners, the first place they will seek help is from their own families and friends. Family support is important in helping former prisoners to re-integrate successfully within the communities (Visher, Kachnowski, La Vigne & Travis 2004). Family members are also a source of financial and psychological support in helping former prisoners to rebuild their lives (Cattell 2001). Previous researches mentioned that individuals released from prison commonly encountered multiple challenges upon their release (Visher & Travis 2011). Past research revealed that former prisoners as being too dependent on their family members for social support, as it helps them to strive through life after their release (Visher & Courtney 2007).

Furthermore, Herbert et al. (2015) identified that social support from parents and partners as a shielding factor in former prisoners' lives. Upon their release, families are usually able to provide immediate shelter and enabled them to seek job opportunities. On the other hand, family's refusal to accept them can truly be a tremendous challenge for their re-integration process as long imprisonment period eventually deteriorate family relationship (Lynch & Sabol, 2001). These difficulties faced by the former prisoners are the result of weak family relationship as their families themselves may also struggling with their own financial problems. Commonly, a history of domestic abuse will prevent former male prisoners to return to their partners. For some former prisoners, living with their families is not a choice. This is because past conflict in the family are one of the reasons they are refused by their own family (Gouvis-Roman & Travis 2004).

Therefore, good relationship between former prisoners and their families function as a shield to prevent these offenders to fall back into their criminal activities (Maruna 2001). Family is the core in social networking for former prisoners to re-integrate within society (Malik-Kane & Visher 2008). Essentially, family provides a safe shelter for them

(Martinez & Abrams 2013); hence, failure to provide safe shelters will result in former prisoners losing their support system. Prisoners who are unwelcomed and unacknowledged by their own families will have problems in obtaining shelter, due to the scarcity of affordable homes, low source of income to pay the monthly rent, as well as stigma and discrimination faced by them leads to their homelessness. Besides, family also serves as the guiding light to stop them from re-engaging in criminal activities again (Hochstetler, DeLisi & Pratt 2010), thus, support and help given by family members further provides them hope and motivation in becoming better individuals (Taylor 2012).

## Research Methodology

The qualitative research involving former prisoners, consisted of recidivists, was conducted in 2016. The location of interest for this study was at the Chow Kit road, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Moreover, a nearby non-governmental organisation (NGO) known as 'Persatuan Kebajikan Komuniti Ikhlas Malaysia' (IKHLAS) was determined and the organisation operates a *drop-in centre* for newly released former prisoners, drug addicts, and sex workers. For this study, only 16 respondents were selected via the snowball-sampling technique. The respondent selection process was primarily based on the achieved saturation point during data sampling process. Meanwhile, the inclusion criteria for the respondents were further described in Table 2.

**Table 2: Inclusion criteria for the respondents**

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- Former prisoners
  - Male and female
  - Aged 21 years and above
  - Possess record of repeating crime (all type of crimes)
  - Diverse background of all race and religion
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This study employed semi-structured interviews that enables the researcher to use the pre-planned interview guide for a proper direction but at the same time, provide participants the opportunity to convey their thoughts through a range of senses. Meanwhile, the interview protocol was constructed based on the literature reviews, research questions, and theoretical framework. The flexibility of the open-ended questions was considered useful as deeper conversations unfold and further generate additional insights on the subject. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, consent forms were given to each respondents and they were informed on the interview questions as well as their role in this research. Furthermore, their participation was voluntary in accordance to the research ethics protocol. They were allowed to decline to answer any questions laid out by the interviewers, without prejudice.

In addition, the collected data (i.e. participant's background, location, contact, etc.) will be kept confidential. The respondents' names were also coded in pseudonyms as to preserve anonymity and avoid the risk of information leakage. Each pseudonym was arranged accordingly by a numbering system to ease the researcher in identifying the sequence of their interviews. Nevertheless, the social demographic information in Table 3 shows how the research was able to associate between family refusal and difficulty of obtaining shelter.

## Research Findings and Analysis

In this study, all respondents were from various states and aged between 36 to 63 years old. From 16 respondents (male = 14; female = 2), only 14 of whom were homeless. From the 14 interviewed respondents, 13 were single. Data also stated that 14 former prisoners were unemployed. Henceforth, this situation shows that unemployment is also a factor related to their homelessness. The research also found that 14 of the respondents were either had HIV, hepatitis B or C, tuberculosis or a combination of these diseases. In addition, one former prisoner had a mental health issue. In terms of family relationship, 13 of them had weak family relationships with their families. Therefore, these 13 respondents showed the connection between their family's refusals to accept former prisoners with their homelessness problem.

This article further discusses three main findings, which are (1) refusal to live with family, (2) failure to be in lodging for long periods, and (3) absence of parents to live with - as causes on why these respondents have no shelter.

From the findings, most of the respondents refused to return to their families. Lufti, Latif, Ramli, Razak, Zarul, and Syamsul stated that they were better off living away from their families, even though they had to go through hardships as homeless people on the streets. As an illustration, Lufti had been living under a bridge for nearly 20 years on his own free will. In the same manner, Latif decided to live in Kuala Lumpur since he could not deal the way his family treated him. Ramli also had not returned to his hometown for nearly 2 years while Zarul had willingly migrated to Kuala Lumpur, and refused to live with his siblings.

*I refused to live with my family, and this has caused me to suffer for 20 years, living under the bridge.*

(Lufti/ 28 April 2016/ 8.24 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

**Table 3: Demography and History of Homeless Former Prisoners**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Amount of Imprisonment</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Residency</b>	<b>Family relationship</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Addiction Status</b>	<b>Health Condition</b>
Lufti	Male	K.L	36 years old	2 times	Single	Lives under a bridge	Accepted by family but refused by siblings	Unemployed	Stopped	HIV
Siva	Male	Perak	54 years old	8 times	Single	Has no home	Refused by family	Unemployed	Still addicted	HIV
Hafiz	Male	Melaka	48 years old	7 times	Married	Has no home	Not all family members accept	Unemployed	Stopped	Hepatitis B and C
Suhaimi	Male	Negeri Sembilan	42 years old	More than 3-4 times (Respondent unable to recall)	Single	Has no home	Refused by family	Unemployed	Still addicted	HIV
Suhaila	Female	Kelantan	63 years old	5 times	Widow	Has no home	Refused by family	Working	Stopped	Hepatitis B
Rahimah	Female	Kelantan	46 years old	4 times	Single	Has no home	Well accepted	Unemployed	Still addicted	Psychological problem
Latif	Male	Terengganu	43 years old	5 times	Single	Refused to live with family	Refused by family	Unemployed	Still addicted	HIV
Nabil	Male	Kuala Lumpur	40 years old	2 times	Single	Returned to family	Refused by family due to repeating crimes	Unemployed	Still addicted	HIV

**Continuation of Table 3:**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Amount of Imprisonment</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Residency</b>	<b>Family relationship</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Addiction Status</b>	<b>Health condition</b>
Amir	Male	Kelantan	53 Years Old	4 Times	Single	Has no home	Refused by family	Unemployed	Still addicted	Hepatitis C
Ramli	Male	Kelantan	38 Years Old	2 Times	Single	Has no home	Refused by family	Unemployed - refuses to work	Still addicted	HIV
Razak	Male	Pahang	41 Years Old	3 Times	Widower	Has no home	Refused by family	Unemployed	Still addicted	Asthma and Hepatitis C
Zahid	Male	Kelantan	33 Years Old	11 Times	Single	Has no home	Accepted by family but refused by siblings	Unemployed	Still addicted	HIV & tuberculosis
Naim	Male	Terengganu	46 Years Old	2 Times	Single	Lives away from family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Still addicted	Hepatitis C
Zarul	Male	Pahang	36 Years Old	5 Times	Single	Refused to stay with sister	Refused by parents but well accepted by siblings	Working	Still addicted	HIV, Hepatitis B and C
Fikri	Male	Johor	36 Years Old	3 Times	Married	Lives with family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Stopped	Nil
Syamsul	Male	Melaka	40 Years Old	4 Times	In a relationship	Has no home	Refused by family	Unemployed	Still addicted	HIV and Hepatitis C



*(I have been) Living alone for a long period already. I still return to my hometown and it is not that I do not have a home, absolutely, I do. From Terengganu; I am. I have a house and my dad lives there but truly, I could not live with my family. I did live with them once but it felt awkward and unhappy. I felt uncomfortable so I decided to go back to Kuala Lumpur*

(Latif, / 29 April 2016/ 10.16 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS)

*Now that I think of it, along with this kind of condition I suffered I feel like I am a burden to both my parents. This is my third year of not going back to my hometown whilst my mom keeps insisting for me to return home.*

(Razak/ 29 April 2016/ 3.21 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*Due to fact that I am a former prisoner; hence I went to Kuala Lumpur to seek for refuge. I felt heartbroken. And I want to prevent any bad and harmful things from happening if I were to be with my family. Therefore, I went to Kuala Lumpur.*

(Zarul/ 24 August 2016/ 8.13 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*My family had requested me to return home but I told them that I could not do so as for now I want to live in Kuala Lumpur.*

(Syamsul/ 24 August 2016/ 10.17 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

The incapability to live longer in their family home, especially with siblings, are one of the reasons of the absence of permanent shelter amongst respondents. Suhaimi, Ramli, Naim, and Fikri stated that if they were to return to their families, they could only live for a temporary period. Consequently, this situation has made Suhaimi, Ramli, Naim, and Fikri migrating to Kuala Lumpur to seek for employment.

*As my siblings knew of my past, I could only live with them for one or two days. Should it be longer than that, we would eventually figure out that it shall not work out, and therefore, I moved out willingly.*

(Suhaimi/ 28 April 2016/ 2.13 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*If I were to go back to my hometown, it would only be for a week or two. I am aware that I do not have anything; therefore, I could not stay there for too long.*

(Ramli/ 29 April 2016/ 2.23 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*I could live there but not for too long, one or two months at the most. Soon afterwards, they will be fussing over the fact that I am unemployed, and that I just lazed around the house the whole day. Therefore, I decided to migrate into Kuala Lumpur, far from them.*

(Naim/ 29 April 2016/ 5.20 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*I was not given any time to live with my family. However, I realize it on my own to cut short the stay. Before I left, I met my old friends to ask of any job opportunities. In addition, once I obtained one, I left home.*

(Fikri/ 24 August 2016/ 9.12 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

Moreover, the former prisoners' failure to live with their family is mostly due to their refusal to accept them due to the weak family relationship. The respondents informed that they were offended by their family members' behaviour who often labelled them negatively and they felt insulted with the negative labelling. For instance, Lufti and Ramli admitted that they could no longer deal with the harsh words directed at them.

*I heard them talking behind my back in which; they said that I took drugs again and I have no better things to do. Therefore, I could not take it anymore.*

(Lufti/ 28 April 2016/ 8.10 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*I caught them belittling me when I was at my family home.*

(Ramli/ 29 April/ 2.18 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

Moreover, the former prisoners stated that they were not only insulted with negative names but also became the first to be accused if theft or loss of valuable items occurred in the family (LaVigne, Naser, Brooks & Castro, 2005). Family members had instilled the doubtless suspicious towards the former prisoners.

Furthermore, a more critical behaviour influencing the feeling of disappointment amongst former prisoners is that their family members hid valuable items from them for fear of it-being stolen by them. Lufti, Siva, and Syamsul mentioned that this attitude is a reason for them to live apart from their family. Rather than living comfortably in their family home, they prefer to stay away to avoid from being accused:

*My family had always accused me, in spite of the fact that I just got out of prison. I did not do all the things they accused me of doing. For example, my sister's jewellery pawn letter went missing but it actually was only misplaced. They did not look for it properly but they directly judged and accused me of stealing it.*

(Lufti / 28 April 2016/ 8.26 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*Sometimes when I returned to my hometown, they would say that I am used to being a bad guy - always stealing shoes, stealing bikes. The stigma always happened due to our past. However, I am indeed trying to change, and honestly; these conditions make me sad.*

(Siva / 28 April 2016/ 10.18 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*Even though I am trying to change, due to this (always being accused), I have become fed up, as I did not do anything but they will still accuse me.*

(Razak/ 29 April 2016/ 3.16 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

In addition, the study also showed that HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis, suffered by the respondents were also another reasons as to why their family refused to accept them, or deliberately distanced themselves from the former prisoners. Siva, Latif, and Ramli, who were suffering from HIV, directly expressed that their family had disowned them once they knew that they have HIV. However, Siva, Latif and Ramli, had not put the entire blame on their family, as they understood the negative perceptions and myths surrounding HIV, such as the fear of the disease being contagious:

*For example is my younger brother(s). They did not want to accept me as I have HIV. They were scared if they too; would contract the disease.*

(Siva/ 28 April 2016/ 10.21 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*For I have this disease; then I am not normal like everybody else, I have HIV. They looked at me in a weird way. My family even separated the food containers because they were scared of the food coming into contact with a person who has HIV.*

(Latif/ 29 April 2016/ 10.18 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*When they knew I had HIV, they could not take it. With this kind of condition, I might be a burden to them. The fear was clearly illustrated on how they treated me.*

(Ramli/ 29 April 2016/ 2.12 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

Furthermore, Latif also mentioned that his family separated the dishes because they feared that other family members might contract HIV from him. Hence, he washed his dishes right after used. All the ill-treated respondents confessed that they felt like an outcast even though they are part of the family.

Another finding from this study showed a lower potential of getting shelter amongst former prisoners whose parents had passed away. With no parents around had caused a huge impact on them in terms of shelter and reliable people who they can depend on. Suhaimi and Ramli mentioned that the absence of their parents contributed to them not staying at their parents' house that are now occupied by their siblings. For them, parents are the main backbone to these offenders in starting a new life after being released. Therefore, the death of their parents led them to not having any place to go whilst most of the respondents felt awkward and uncomfortable living at their parents' house with their married siblings.

Furthermore, having a place to live becomes harder when one have no family members. A foster family, for example, raised Suhaila, and subsequently, imprisonment had caused her foster family to sever connections with her. Upon released from prison, she had nowhere to go and hence, she took shelter at her friend's house. She resided with sex workers and drug addicts, resulted in her being influenced with drugs again. In short, having no shelter had caused these former prisoners to sleep on the streets and thus, consequently increases the risk of them to re-engage in criminal activities again. Nearly all of the homeless respondents returned to their old ways, thus, living away from their families had led them to return to their criminal activities.

*Well, since my parents were gone, and I lived with my siblings just temporarily, so I had to move out when the time comes.*

(Suhaimi/ 28 April 2016/ 2.22 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS)

*I wanted to go back to my hometown but there was no one there anyway. Therefore, I had to stay alone in Kuala Lumpur.*

(Suhaila/ 29 April 2016/ 8.15 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS)

*I only stayed with my family for a temporary period. I have no parents anymore too. I also did not know whom to live with if I went back to my hometown. In the end, I would always return to Kuala Lumpur each time I was released.*

(Ramli/ 29 April 2016/ 3.14 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS)

In summary, the imprisonment weakened the bond between former prisoners and their families. Imprisonment and recidivism indeed influenced the family relationship, which in return, led to the rejection by their family. Families that refused these former prisoners had left a negative impact to their transition back into society. A weak family relationship also directed them into thinking that they have no strong reason to live with their families. Lufti said that he was more comfortable living away from family. The feeling towards his family had faded and similarly with Syamsul. He stated that he would not want to live with his family again because they did not love him. Lufti and Syamsul had both mentioned that they did not want to depend on their family that had disowned them and they were better off living with their peers in the same situation whom could accept, respect, and understand them.

*Where would I go? I would definitely go back to square one and I would not return to my family. I would go back to my old place because I did not think my family would accept me if I were to go back to them as I did not have anything left.*

(Lufti/ 28 April 2016/ 8.14 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

*Yes, I knew no one loves me anymore. Therefore, I decided not to live with them anymore. I went to Kuala Lumpur and started afresh.*

(Syamsul/ 24 August 2016/ 10.21 AM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

Correspondingly, family's refusal caused the former prisoners to feel like outcasts. Their families' attitude of refusing but also ignoring the former prisoners' wellbeing led them to believe that they are not loved and needed anymore. The issue becomes more severe when their families completely disowned them. Suhaila, Zarul, and Syamsul further confessed that their families were no longer accepting them. Moreover, Suhaila informed that her involvement in drug abuse had caused them to disown her. She said, "... (my) family did not like it when I took drugs; therefore they just threw me away..." (Suhaila). Meanwhile Zarul also said, "...I tried to improve myself but the family did not want me anymore" (Zarul).

The study also found that there are cases wherein refusal by siblings is more significant than by their parents'. Most of the respondents were fully abandoned by their siblings. In Syamsul's case, for example, he said that his siblings had completely disowned him due to his drug addiction. He said "...My family abandoned me because my younger sibling could not accept me" (Syamsul). Zahid also faced the same situation whereby he stated that his siblings could not accept him because he is a former prisoner. However, Zahid maintained a good relationship with his parents because they still loved and accepted him. According to Zahid:

*My parents-were fine with me. But not my siblings. They would not talk to me because I was a former prisoner.*

(Zahid/ Redivist (P1) 29 April 2016/ 4.13 PM/ Persatuan IKHLAS).

The above findings showed that family's refusal caused former prisoners to lose family support system in their process of re-integration back into society. The absence of family support leaves a critical impact on their psychological and physical well-being too. The re-integration process is a harder without family support (Beale & Jones-Walker, 2004) and the greatest impact of not having family support is their tendency to re-engage in crime and unlawful activities again. This finding is consistent with past studies in confirming the importance of family support as an influence to recidivism and crime prevention among former prisoners.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Access to stable and appropriate shelter is an important component in former prisoners' strategy of re-integration. Not having a proper home has always been linked to criminal activities. Commonly, the former prisoners who end up not having a place to live are prone to be homeless. Peers who are criminals usually surround those who are homeless, and these peers draw them back to their criminal lifestyles and drug abuse. In the Malaysian context, one of the post release programme can be seen through the parole system. The release is made under the condition that prisoners have to serve their imprisonment period in good behaviour. Hence, the prisoners are under observation by police officers who are in charge of monitoring former prisoners who are under parole (Khadijah, Fauziah, Suhaimi, Shahrazad, Salina & Norulhuda, 2013; Wan & Najibah 2014). This system was designed to ease former prisoners' re-integration process. Besides, it was introduced to instil their sense of responsibility towards themselves, family as well as to the society.

Moreover, this parole programme is implemented under the Imprisonment Act 1995; which came into force on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2008. The first programme, which included 64 prisoners, started on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2018. This was carried out to allow the prisoners to undergo their punishment and comply with the conditions made by the Parole council to serve the rest of their imprisonment period under the programme named "*Program Pembangunan Insan*

(PPI)". In general, the crime considered under the parole system are stealing and burglary, while crimes related to rape and murders are treated in a different manner. The prisoners can be considered for parole if they obeyed the stated conditions and for good behaviour, and participate in rehabilitation sessions, are being given moral support by their family, and guaranteed employment after being released from prison (AWANI 2017).

Apart from that, the prison system also provided halfway houses as temporary housing for former prisoners after they have served their punishment (imprisonment). The idea originated from the Crime lab, which was held between fifth of October to the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2009 (Malaysian Prison Department 2012). The halfway houses are only for temporary stay and equipped with sports facilities where classes were conducted by NGOs. There are 13 halfway houses including in Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysian Prison Department 2012). Additionally, the place also acts as an alternative to the parole system. It is an initiative of the Prison Department before the prisoners return to their families. Another aspect of the halfway houses is to assist the Malaysian Prison Department to reduce recidivism rate (Wan & Najibah 2014) as it provides moral support for them for they are usually subjected to stress over society's perception of them (Utusan Online 2011). Indirectly, it can also contribute to better mental health for them before being accepted back by the society (Utusan Online 2011).

However, there are also problems in this parole system and halfway houses where the selection of who will be included is rather limited and based on certain criterion that they need to fulfil. The accessibility to this parole system is dependent on the type of crime and will only be considered after the prisoners have served half of their punishment (imprisonment). Likewise, halfway houses have their own limitations too, as it could not sustain large numbers of released prisoners. These former prisoners are not allowed to stay for more than three months and therefore, the short period is unrealistic in bringing about change in them as the rehabilitation process takes a longer time.

The failure of these programmes show that there is no effective post-release programme and further action for community-based programmes towards former prisoners' transition back into society is not available. Based on this research, one of the most important findings is the initiative to assist former prisoners in strengthening their family ties. Long periods of imprisonment impacts on the former prisoners' relationship with their families. It is undeniable that family is an important resource in the re-integration of former prisoners back into the society. Former prisoners will refrain themselves from committing crimes as they feel that they will lose their loved ones again. Besides that, family is also the main source of shelter for former prisoners, and it can be noted that shelter is the foremost concern for most former prisoners who had been released (La Vigne, Visher & Castro 2004). Family also acts as the main financial support for former prisoners (diZerega et al. 2010). Most former prisoners depended on their families and friends to get employment (La Vigne et al. 2004). Moreover, former prisoners also relied on family for transportation. Hence, this situation proves that families played vital roles in providing the social support needed by these former prisoners to ensure a successful re-integration back into society.

The re-integration process of these offenders will be easier if their families accepted them. Therefore, there is a need for a post-release program, which will act as a catalyst in rebuilding family relationships. Post-release programs should ensure the involvement of both families and former prisoners for a smooth re-integration process. Strategies applied for the improvement of family relationship can provide positive results (diZerega et al. 2010).

The success of former prisoners upon returning to their families is a turning point in most of their lives. Family indeed plays a very important role in providing shelter; either permanent or temporary, to former prisoners. Nonetheless, the integration process becomes tougher when former prisoners return to families who are reluctant (or totally refuse) to accept them. Thus, this research article would like to suggest the need to reunite former prisoners with their families as a main contributor to their social support system and as a means of preventing them from returning to a life of crime.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Jabatan Pentadbiran dan Keadilan Sosial, Fakulti Sastera dan Sains Sosial, Universiti Malaya. Email: [mohdalifjasni@gmail.com](mailto:mohdalifjasni@gmail.com); or [alevmikail@gmail.com](mailto:alevmikail@gmail.com), Tel: 01111164800; [shajar@um.edu.my](mailto:shajar@um.edu.my); [noralina@um.edu.my](mailto:noralina@um.edu.my); [zaitonazman@gmail.com](mailto:zaitonazman@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Fakulti Undang-Undang, Universiti Malaya, Email: [jalzabdi@um.edu.my](mailto:jalzabdi@um.edu.my)

<sup>3</sup> Fakulti Pentadbiran dan Pengajian Polisi, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, [Khairiyah@ns.uitm.edu.my](mailto:Khairiyah@ns.uitm.edu.my)

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